



National Center for Mental Health Promotion  
and Youth Violence Prevention

**Latino Networking Group**  
**Teleconference: Positive Strategies for Engaging Latino Families**  
**Thursday, January 26, 2006**

**PARTICIPANTS**

**National Center Staff**

- Nancy Macías-Smith, Technical Assistance Specialist, Safe Schools/Healthy Students, Co-Coordinator of Latino Networking Group
- Lauren Gilman, Technical Assistance Specialist, Youth Violence Prevention Programs, Co-Coordinator of Latino Networking Group
- Woody Clift, Technical Assistance Specialist, Safe Schools/Healthy Students

**Grantee Participants**

- Maritza Alvarado  
Spanish Action League  
Syracuse, NY (*YVPP*)
- Liza Andrew-Miller  
Hillsboro School District 1J  
Hillsboro, OR (*SS/HS*)
- Maggie Byrnes and Nidia Ponce  
Aurora Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center  
Aurora, CO (*YVPP*)
- Lindy Case  
Northwest Educational Service District 189 (Skagit County)  
Anacortes, WA (*SS/HS*)
- Phoebe Chase  
California School-Age Consortium  
Santa Clara County, CA (*YVPP*)
- Robert Navarro  
Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic  
Yakima, WA (*YVPP*)
- Jocelyn Palmer-Perry  
Skagit County Youth and Family Services  
Mt. Vernon, WA (*YVPP*)
- Randall Ranes and Vivian Gales  
Bakersfield City School District  
Bakersfield, CA (*SS/HS*)

## Participant Introductions / Expectations for This Call

### **Phoebe Chase, California School-Age Consortium (YVPP):**

- This project is located in South Santa Clara County, focusing on two rural communities outside of San Jose, California. The population includes migrant farmworkers.
- The purpose of this program is to connect after-school programs with other youth violence prevention and youth-serving organizations, to unite them for the common purpose of keeping youth safe.
- The project is planning a series of open houses with parents to explain what is available for their kids for summer programming, and for children's safety during the summer months.
- Phoebe is interested in how best to meet the needs of Hispanic immigrants. She is looking for good leads to help make connections to get families involved in a positive way.

### **Maritza Alvarado, Spanish Action League (YVPP):**

- The Spanish Action League (also called La Liga) is the only Hispanic agency in a city of 150,000 people; 7,800 are Hispanic, and more than half of that number, about 4,500, are concentrated in the near west side of town. The population is predominantly from Puerto Rico; Mexican migrants who bring their families are the next largest group; then Cubans; and then people from Central and South America. (This agency is part of the coalition led by the city of Syracuse's YVPP grant.)
- The statistics are alarming: Syracuse is second in the nation for Latino child poverty. The housing and schools are poor, and there are not many opportunities for parents because of the language barrier.
- A more pressing issue is that almost a week ago, the school district announced the closing of a middle school that mostly serves Hispanic and African American populations. Three other schools in the same area are on the New York state watch list because of decreasing test scores; because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the state has no option but to close down at least one school. This agency is trying to mobilize parents to attend the meetings and forums that are starting in the area to address the school closings.
- Maritza is interested in figuring out strategies for dealing with language and cultural barriers and how to rally parents to participate and have their voices heard.

### **Lindy Case, Northwest Educational Service District 189 (SS/HS):**

- This is a new Safe Schools/Healthy Students grantee located in Skagit County, Washington, where there is a large migrant Latino population.
- Lindy is interested in working with migrant advocates and home visitors to provide support.

### **Maggie Byrnes, Aurora Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center (YVPP):**

- Aurora, Colorado, is a working-class suburb, with many different ethnic groups. It includes people from Africa and Russia, and there is also a large Latino population of undocumented workers from Mexico and Central and South America.
- About a year ago, the project started a parent group called the Latino Connection, which includes day care for kids. The group addresses expectations for living in the United States, customs and laws, how to connect participants to services, and expectations for schools. It has been really helpful and successful.
- The project has been less successful in working with Latino families in Functional Family

Therapy (FFT), which is the primary intervention of this SAMHSA grant. It is quite difficult to get parents to come in and talk with the project staff while their kids are in detention. There are also a number of Latino kids in detention due to problems with their immigration status, whom the staff cannot do much to help. The dropout rate is pretty dismal for Latino kids, especially those in high school. There are also growing gang problems.

### **Grantee Presenters – Introductions**

#### **Jocelyn Palmer-Perry, Skagit County Youth and Family Services, WA (YVPP):**

- Skagit County Youth and Family Services is a county department that provides a variety of services. The SAMHSA grant funds a program called the Kulshan Creek At-Risk Intervention Specialist (ARIS) program.
- Skagit County is primarily a rural, agricultural area with small cities and towns scattered around. The Latino population is concentrated in the Mt. Vernon/Burlington area. Most of the Latinos in the area have their origins in Mexico. There are some migrant farmworkers, as well as families that settled out of the migrant stream decades ago.
- Jocelyn has worked with the Latino community for her entire career of 25 years. She has a degree in Spanish, with an emphasis in Latin American Studies, and an M.S.W. in working with children and families.

#### **Randall Ranes, Bakersfield, CA (SS/HS):**

- Randall Ranes is an administrator in the Bakersfield City School District in the Student Services Department, located two hours north of Los Angeles in the San Joaquin Valley.
- The district is one of 13 school districts in Bakersfield. It is an elementary school district with 28,000 students, serving preschool through eighth grade. Nine out of 10 students receive free or reduced lunch.
- There are 43 schools, and the ethnic breakdown is 71 percent Hispanic, 14 percent white, 12 percent black, and there are a number of other ethnicities. There are over 100 different languages spoken, but Spanish is the predominant language.

### **Questions for Grantee Presenters**

#### **Q: Jocelyn, What has your community has done to reach out to Latino parents and families?**

- Our program is a mix of individual case management and community outreach. We communicate closely with schools and work in partnership with a number of agencies.
- This project coordinates closely with the local police department. We work primarily out of a community policing station that is in a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. We get referrals from school counselors, migrant advocates, and community members often self-refer, because we've been around for quite a while.
- We do some collaboration with the school in the area of community outreach. We are helping to set up presentations about gang prevention, and parents often ask for information on other topics, such as truancy laws and immigration. People also ask for other types of training, for example CPR classes in Spanish. We provide a wide variety of community education programs, including group-based as well as individual parenting classes. We also have a community reading and singing program.

- At the end of this grant, we will be transitioning many program elements to the public health department, in order to continue working with young children and parents around literacy, bonding, attachments, and early developmental education for parents.
- We have a tutoring program that we coordinate with the school, located in the community policing station. Elementary and expelled middle school and high school students do homework with tutors. In addition, we have volunteers starting to come to read with kids. There is a public policy board for the ARIS program and the local Hispanic multidisciplinary team that staffs cases on a clinical and resources level.
- We have tried to encourage networking among organizations that provide services to the Latino community, both Latino-serving agencies and others that serve the general population. These organizations come together on a regular basis to discuss issues facing the local community.
- We also have a public information campaign. One of our staff has a radio program on a local college station, a Spanish radio program for two hours every Monday. The program discusses topics people have asked about, such as health systems or mental health issues. We have several newsletters and papers in Spanish in the area. The editor of one is on our board, so we put articles in that paper and the Kulshan Creek newsletter that is published by the police. We have a new Spanish public access TV station, so we've started featuring our events on that.

**Q: Randall, What strategies have been successful in dealing with language and/or cultural barriers?**

- Communication. Materials are sent in English and Spanish, and there is a translator/interpreter department available full-time. Our local university gives course work on parenting, academics, and parent involvement.
- Training and mentoring. The parent camp, along with summer school, gives courses on nutrition and family life. Last summer, we had over 700 parents. We offer a parent advocacy course to teach parents how to work within the education system for their children. There is also a leadership course, which discusses how to achieve positive results, work cooperatively with the schools, and how things work in this country, including developing leadership skills.
- Academic involvement. Parents are encouraged to get involved in the schools, and there is a GED equivalent for Spanish-speaking parents, offered in collaboration with the Mexican Consulate.
- A warm environment. There is large a migrant program that serves about 10,000 people, offering many opportunities for parents to acquire new skills. We try to provide an environment that is warm and inviting.
- Employee selection. Many employees are bilingual, live in the parents' neighborhoods, or share the family's background, which helps with communication.

**Q: Jocelyn, Do you have anything to add about language and cultural barriers?**

- It comes down to creating relationships with families through consistent provision of programs so that trust develops over time. If you don't have a relationship, people won't come.
- We have been challenged in trying to get translations into Oaxacan languages, it's a growing new area for us in terms of immigrant populations. We also have to work on anticipating barriers and doing what we can to meet needs ahead of time – child care, food,

transport, home visits, and weekly reminders. It's very time consuming, but it provides turnout.

- We try to make classes open-ended or link to other things so people can maintain momentum. We may work with a client and hook him or her into a parenting class, and then he or she may feel empowered to join in other community efforts. If we can keep clients involved, they will bring other people along, or get families involved through word of mouth.
- We had grandmothers come for community reading and singing, and we realized that they were the primary caretakers of children, so there were big cultural differences. The University of Washington offered a program they are piloting in early education for grandmothers, so they came up and offered it in Spanish.
- We have extremely high dropout rates, gang problems, and discrimination in schools. Some of our staff have been invited to sit on a diversity committee working to make the schools more accessible to Latino students.

**Q: Randall, Thinking about ways that Latinos are strong—being family-centered is a big issue and a strength—how does your school district acknowledge this strength and incorporate it in successful ways to bridge the gap with Latino parents?**

- We found that if we have an inspirational speaker who can connect to the community then others will come through word of mouth. In our community, Latinos like to be involved in committees. We have so many: District Advisory Committee, Regional Advisory Committee, and the Parent Advisory Committee, which is at the school level.
- We offer educational courses that connect with values of local families while building relationships with school staff. The members of the Parent Advisory Committee are able to acquire leadership skills and then work independently within the system to address issues that are important to them.
- The most successful tactic we've used is working through a personal relationship, some connection, and then getting folks together with guidance about how to work in the educational system, along with courses like nutrition, education, getting a GED, or learning English. These programs serve to emphasize the value of education and encourage cooperative relationships with families and communities.

**Q: Jocelyn, Do you have anything to add about making use of Latino values in terms of family and respect and getting families involved?**

- Our ARIS program is designed to work from a system wide or a social work model. While we might get an individual referral from the school for a kid, we will work with the whole family and whoever is available to be a support. We look to holistic and strength-based mental health programs and opportunities for families to be involved in activities. It lets us work on strengthening the family.
- We are working with families to support roles. There is a certain amount of role strain to acculturation between parents and children, and grandparents and parents—we reinforce roles in the family. We can acculturate families to the education system to feel more self-confident in their role, because it sometimes gets eroded if their English is limited.
- We work with fathers to expand their role and be involved with young children and schools. We haven't had long-term results yet, but they see it as their responsibility to go to school conferences, instead of that just being the mom's role.
- We have used the book *Parenting with Pride Latino Style*,\* which talks about reframing

traditional values: how can we make them relevant to parents living in both Anglo and Latino cultures, when kids are raised in primarily Anglo culture. Instead of the hard-line, authoritarian style, we use a two-way style with a family therapist, and we work on communication skills within the family. We also address issues of respect in relationships to clients—how do we model mutual respect and acknowledge that people see us as authority? Sometimes we can use our role to the child’s advantage for making recommendations, but sometimes people do not follow through. You must find a balance.

*\*Parenting with Pride Latino Style: How to Help Your Child Cherish Your Cultural Values and Succeed in Today’s World, by Dr. Carmen Inoa Vasquez, is available in both Spanish and English, and can be obtained at:*

[http://www.harperacademic.com/catalog/excerpt\\_xml.asp?isbn=0060543019](http://www.harperacademic.com/catalog/excerpt_xml.asp?isbn=0060543019).

**Q: Can we explore the Bakersfield Children’s Collaborative with Randall? Many of our callers are interested in collaboration. Please give us your personal opinion about how it has been working.**

- Before we applied to the initiative, all partners participated in planning, and we had a shared vision about what we wanted to accomplish. Our initiative was to reduce violence by creating a safe school environment, prevent substance abuse, encourage positive mental health, and prepare children for school.
- We partnered with law enforcement, probation, the DA, the Department of Mental Health, the Alliance Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault, and the Boys and Girls Club. In the process of planning and reconfirming our relationship, we developed contracts where we outlined the services.
- Our program evaluator is involved in articulating services and outcome indicators and in communicating with partners what expectancies are. It is hard to measure the full impact, since relationships extend into so many different areas in working with new people and sharing resources. It is extremely positive and empowering.
- Our Community Resource Center offers ESL classes, parent GED classes, counseling services, and case management. School psychologists are trained to make home visits and work with parents and preschool kids. The Resource Center also offers food and clothing to families in need.
- We try to encourage parents to come to collaborative meetings and work as a group to address their needs.
- The program evaluator is conducting focus groups, in order to gather information in a systematic way about what services might benefit families.

**Q: You said it was difficult to measure the impact of your collaborative. Was observing the difference you have made part of your evaluation?**

- We have put a lot of energy and time into program evaluation. We are still at baseline and initial implementation, but we have multiple measures at different levels of the system, which are lined up with the goals of the initiative.

**Q: Jocelyn, Skagit County just received an SS/HS grant. Can you talk about the transition from your YVPP grant to a large-scale school-based initiative? What strategies have you used?**

- Quite a bit of the YVPP programming will be transitioning to the SS/HS grant. A portion

of it will be continuing in Mt. Vernon, and we will be expanding beyond Kulshan Creek, to the Burlington/Edison school district.

- We have a combination of an SS/HS grant and other substance abuse and mental health funding from the state. The no-cost extension has enabled us to bridge to an SS/HS grant, combined with a smaller grant.
- There will be efforts to connect the migrant educational regional office with migrant advocates in the Mt. Vernon schools. We will also be providing parenting classes, Strengthening Families classes, and substance abuse prevention groups for kids.
- We are working on realigning positions in our department. The county designated some of the positions as Spanish speaking. That will help us with recruitment and maintaining the program beyond our grant. We hope to get some AmeriCorps/Vista members to help augment staffing levels.

## Strategies and Challenges

### **Maggie Byrnes:**

- In Aurora, we have been working with Latino youth in detention, doing a combination of vocational and school linkage work. We have Spanish-speaking staff members who continue to work with the youth after they leave detention, providing mental health services and encouraging them to stay in school.
- There is also an INS juvenile detention facility where young people are sent. Many of these kids are in no-man's land, waiting to find out if they will be deported, and some wait there for as long as a year. A large percentage of these young people crossed the border alone and may not have any family in the local area. Those who are being held simply for immigration violations are mixed in with delinquent children, and they are often recruited by Latino gang members. We are trying to figure out how to meet their needs.

### **Liza Andrew-Miller:**

- One of the core initiatives of this new SS/HS grantee site is to address issues of racism in school, and identify how it affects school culture and school violence, particularly with Latino kids. We are looking at this through school culture surveys and disciplinary rates. Also, we have a diversity team and are bringing in community partners and school people to look at how the issue of racism plays out in the school and community, and we are developing a strategy to address it. This part of the project involves training judges and lawyers on racism issues. As a core intervention strategy, we also do a dialogue series about racism. By training school administrators and local leaders, we are building internal awareness about this issue.
- The district has a Hispanic outreach office, and it plans to add 2-3 people who will focus on family engagement for elementary school families. We will do training for school workers on family engagement and reducing barriers for Hispanic families.

### **Robert Navarro:**

- Our MST project has been working with juvenile justice, and we call families on a monthly basis to ensure they understand the process. Sometimes we work with other community members to help us reach hard-to-engage individuals, and we provide various services through collaborating agencies.

**Lindy Case:**

- As a new SS/HS grant linked with Jocelyn's project in Skagit County, Washington, we will be utilizing family advocates to reach out to the Latino community.

**Maggie Byrnes:**

- We have a grant to provide wraparound services for 0 to 5 year olds called Project Bloom. It's a system-of-care grant to work with young children through day cares, Head Start, and others to identify kids who have serious emotional issues and offer interventions. It's a wraparound team, and the family gets to decide who is on the team. It has been very successful with Latino families—they choose the case worker, mental health provider, and teacher. Parent groups provide child care and dinner.

**Phoebe Chase:**

- The California School-Age Consortium is working primarily with after-school providers, including the school district YMCA programs. They have parent workshops once a week for eight weeks on topics including parent involvement, leadership at home, and standardized testing. We want to connect parents who aren't involved with after-school and to educate them about this type of programming as a means to prevent youth violence.

**Jocelyn Palmer-Perry:**

- To encourage involvement, we go to schools, have the school outreach person identify children and make home visits. We have migrant bilingual children's advocates, and they often know parents and know which kids need services. We also do direct outreach through church services, evening events, and Spanish radio and TV.

**Maggie Byrnes:**

- We also put up flyers at grocery stores, restaurants, laundromats, etc.

**Randall Ranes:**

- Our summer outreach literacy program sends teachers into the home. We have father/son and mother/daughter celebrations and also employ parent liaisons, who bridge relationships between the school and family.
- We have been running a boys' camp in the mountains and have recently piloted a parent camp, which includes group-building and trust activities.
- Latino families are often less assertive and so hesitate to challenge the district. This is an empowerment training, focusing on how to work together and support each other, and how to work with schools and find out about resources for problems that might exist. It is a productive strategy for engaging Latino families.

**Maggie Byrnes:**

- One challenge is to get fathers involved in family therapy.

**Robert Navarro:**

- We have had some success with this in Yakima. We try to bring in a male therapist, who may invite the father for coffee on his lunch hour and engage him in a topic of interest to him. We let him know why we want him to be engaged with the family, and we ask his permission. We tell him that many people have done these things, and it has been very



helpful for the child. Although he may not be involved in every session, getting him engaged is very important. Sometimes we'll have a male therapist visit to get that engagement piece.

**Jocelyn Palmer-Perry:**

- For fathers of really young children, we offer parenting classes that are skills-based instead of didactic. Fathers learn specific skills and bring small children in for a lab, and practice with therapists. They really enjoyed that and wrote love letters to their children. Most fathers got very engaged and got others in the community involved. They want to be mentors and take these lessons out into the community.

### Resources and Wrap-Up

- We sent out the following three articles prior to this call:
  - [Lessons from High-Performing Hispanic Schools](http://www.bsd405.org/Portals%5C0%5Cparents%5CParent%20Advisory%20Documents/Lessons.doc) By Gort, Mileidis.  
<http://www.bsd405.org/Portals%5C0%5Cparents%5CParent%20Advisory%20Documents/Lessons.doc>
  - [Meeting the Needs of Hispanic Immigrants](#) By Holman, Linda Jean. (Please let us know if you would like us to send the PDF file.)
  - [Tool Kit For Hispanic Families](http://www.ed.gov/print/parents/academic/involve/toolkit/part.html). By Samuels, Christina A. The tool kit includes nine department publications in English and Spanish languages, including "Questions Parents Ask About Schools," "A Guide for Reading," and "Helping Your Child Succeed in School." <http://www.ed.gov/print/parents/academic/involve/toolkit/part.html>
- Attached you will find a more extensive list of resources.
- Please let us know if you have requests or suggestions for future Latino Networking Group events.

Thank you for your participation. ¡Gracias!